FILLING THE BLANKS

A suburban opportunity for wellbeing

Master Thesis Explanatory Document

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‘Wellbeing’ is not the easiest subject to discuss. It is difficult to quantify, and even more difficult to offer a precise definition. We currently function in a society where our needs are justified and driven by financial motive. Anything outside of what the market tells us we need, or what is economically advantageous, is difficult to comprehend and even harder to fight for. It is engrained in our culture to measure success financially, and to support those working towards it. This focus on wealth stems from the belief that everything that we need or want can be bought – that ‘wellbeing’ is something that will either arrive naturally or by improving financial circumstances.

I started this thesis with the belief that no one intends to live an unfulfilled life. We each strive towards success in the hope of reaching happiness and achieving ‘wellbeing’, yet we have failed to see the entirety of the repercussions of our actions.

My research project will look critically at wellbeing, how we define it, how it is really achieved, and its relationship to architecture and planning. Even measured by conventional methodologies, wellbeing levels in New Zealand are low across all areas, regardless of housing typology, income, age or race. My design intervention will therefore be a proposal for a typical suburban neighbourhood in Auckland, where increasing densities are inevitably remoulding the quarter acre dream. This project will explore numerous constraints surrounding diverse existing building typologies, patterns of home ownership, the suburban mind-set and financial barriers, all of which are factors contributing toward the initial proposition: that standards of wellbeing in the present New Zealand context are poor for many, and that these standards are affected by our housing environments in the broadest sense.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INSPIRATION

Inspiration for this project began by observing and asking questions. How influential is the built environment on the quality of a person’s life? Does it influence our ability to connect socially? Does it promote selfishness, or enhance collectiveness? Could it be partially responsible for the way our values are formed? And most importantly, is our individualistic nature, and the way we separate ourselves from each other, a symptom of a greater problem or the problem itself? The built environment dictates how people live in their homes, streets and cities. A poorly orientated house means that residents will have limited access to sunlight, they will be less likely to use their outdoor spaces, and will therefore live in a harsher environment.

A street designed to maximise vehicle accessibility creates a physical barrier between opposing neighbours and transforms the street from a safe communal space to a vehicle thoroughfare and carpark. In an effort to regain the sense of security that is gradually being lost, fences go up and gates are installed, which only further separates people.

The observation which prompted this investigation was the observation of loneliness. This drove me to find statistical information on our wellbeing; the results of which cemented my focus of study. Can the built environment improve wellbeing? And how can we go about creating opportunities for those who are financially limited by ordinary circumstances and income-earning capacity?
1.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

To address wellbeing in New Zealand I will be looking at the ‘typical’ typology of the existing suburb, and how wellbeing can be improved collectively. Any intervention within the existing infrastructure has many complexities that need to be understood and addressed accordingly.

Upgrading the existing suburbs is something that is currently done on an individual basis, from a developer’s point of view of turning over a profit, or when the council is re-addressing the condition of the public space, typically, the roads. Improving the existing suburban infrastructure is a task that is currently almost impossible. An initiative of this type is one that could only be realized if driven by the community and supported by Council. Unfortunately, collective revitalizations are full of complex issues and limitations such as financial difficulties, lack of social capital and inadequate leadership or guidance. For this reason, my project will attempt to revitalize an area within the existing suburban fabric by taking a practical and sympathetic approach to the realities of existing suburban conditions. The aim of this revitalization is to provide an opportunity for ‘typical residents’ to be a part of a development with the potential to enhance individual and collective wellbeing, increase opportunities for social connections, and allow strong communities to flourish.

This document will demonstrate an intervention across an area of over 3ha in an existing suburb and will detail any new buildings, the level of demolition, the re-distribution of spaces, and ultimately show how the proposed changes can significantly improve wellbeing while also appealing to the typical suburban mind set.

1.3 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

1. Explore a design approach which prioritizes the wellbeing and quality of life of residents over individual and material gain.
2. Explore an alternative solution to increasing density in the suburbs which will enhance community growth.
3. If successful the planning and design should create curiosity for the typical suburban mind-set while also clearly displaying how the changes could improve individual and collective wellbeing.
4. Explore an alternative model for suburban regeneration.
1.4 ARCHITECTURAL QUESTION:

How can we appropriately allow for density increases while improving social wellbeing within suburban neighbourhoods?
1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

My approach is about creating a solid framework for a dramatic shift in the way people live in the suburbs. The architectural input will consider spatial distribution, types of spaces, housing typologies, new complexities that arise, and will test an architectural language of design. A series of examples of the transitions existing residents would typically experience will be illustrated through the developed design of their own home, along with a wider area showcasing all characteristics of the intervention. A before and after analysis will also be done to compare these changes and highlight any added value and its effect on wellbeing, while ensuring the opportunity cost of these changes is also detailed. The practicality of implementing any kind of approach within the existing built environment needs to be considered from various perspectives. Due to my architectural approach being heavily reliant on a more controversial financial and legal approach it has been critical for the understanding and acceptance of my architectural proposal for me to also address it from this standpoint.

The implementation is therefore considered on a conceptual basis. It is with hope that the principles I am trying to achieve would remain the same, while the balance between different aspects such as the amount of demolition, renovation, council input, developer input and communal infrastructure remains conditional to a thorough financial analysis. This would be to ensure that individual parties are not at a loss, that it would have enough financial appeal to investors, and that council would also be able to contribute.
1.6 METHODOLOGY

My primary research methods consist of both a qualitative and a quantitative research approach, each applied at different stages throughout the development of my research project. Through qualitative research which observed the various conditions of spaces, dwellings and their typical relationship to each other, I was able to form a strong sense of direction towards my area of focus. This thought process and observational analysis lead to a secondary research approach of gathering statistical data on wellbeing in New Zealand from various sources.

Alongside this analysis, I also conducted more quantitative primary research of my own to fill the missing gaps relating to my site. Auckland Council provided access to individual property files, which alongside the data available on GIS and site photographs meant I was able to collate various statistics specific to my site. This included the way space was being used and the relationship between public and private spaces, the age of the construction, as well as a subjective assessment of a dwelling’s current ability to influence wellbeing. This simple assessment was done from my own perspective and rated the overall building against various aspects relatable to wellbeing.

The collection of this data meant that I was able to take a topic that was initially very difficult to quantify and measure, and translate it into a model against which I could evaluate my design project. As a result of this, I was also able to define a series of set principles that the project should strive to achieve.

I found that the research and analysis highlighted several key issues throughout suburbia that negatively impacted wellbeing, and it was these issues which became the first influence for the design. From this point, my design process developed consistently as one which worked in parallel with trying to resolve issues while achieving the established wellbeing principles.

Even though to begin with the design was informed by the research, as it progressed it found its way into unknown territory where although the fundamental design decisions can still be supported, many can only be explained or justified through the knowledge and understanding of the topic I have to date. This is when my research methodology becomes one of research through the application of design. By creating spaces, and trying something new, we can begin to understand the potential it can have and how it can positively affect the wellbeing of people individually and collectively.
‘Wellbeing’ is not an easy subject to discuss. It is not easy to understand, see, or measure and often it isn’t something that people think they need. Wellbeing is something that is obtained through social structures and relationships with others. It is not immediate, or something that can be acquired by only one person’s effort, and because there are numerous influencing factors, how we approach the issues surrounding wellbeing can be overwhelming and controversial.

Before I begin to discuss what wellbeing is and how to understand it, I will first take a look at the situation in New Zealand. We currently have several government studies conducted on wellbeing, but these tend to focus only on what is going well. In most cases the research is not presented critically, uses statistics and graphs that can be misleading, and does not give a proper insight into the true scale of the problem. An example is the NZ Government “Loneliness in New Zealand” Report in 2013. The report presents information in a manner which highlights the people who ‘have wellbeing’, but ignores the 480,000 people living in Auckland who have felt differing levels of isolation over the last 12 months.  

This same government report states that “New Zealand is doing fairly well on the international charts”, but other findings from an investigation performed by the Human Potential Centre, the Sovereign Wellbeing Index, found that when compared with 29 other countries, New Zealand ranks in the bottom 10 across all levels of wellbeing. We also ranked 30th for community connections with only 4% of New Zealanders strongly agreeing that they feel close to people in their local area, and last in the table for close relationships with only 36% feeling appreciated by people they are close to.  

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In similar promotional manner, the Auckland City Council “Quality of Life Survey,” in 2013 suggested that New Zealander’s ‘quality of life’ achieves a very high standard. The results have again been presented to focus on what has been achieved, rather than highlighting critical areas for improvement. For example, the report overview under ‘Feelings of Isolation’ states: “Just over two thirds (69%) of Auckland respondents have not felt isolated or lonely over the previous 12 months, with 34% saying never and 35% saying rarely.” 3, again ignoring the almost one third of respondents who have felt isolated or lonely. Statistics NZ used findings from the 2010 General Social Survey for their report ‘Loneliness in New Zealand’ which further highlighted the repercussions of low Social Wellbeing ratings. This research showed that social isolation and loneliness are associated with various health issues and have been identified as serious factors by the Ministry of Health and District Health boards under the ‘Health of older people strategy’. 4

Social isolation has also been specifically identified by the ‘New Zealand suicide prevention strategy 2006-2016’ as a factor for the development of suicide behaviours and by the ‘New Zealand settlement strategy’ which emphasises the importance for recent migrants to be able to connect with their communities. 5 The main conclusion I derived from this report was that 1 in 3 adult New Zealanders, over one million people, had felt lonely to some degree in the last 4 weeks. 6

Other interesting findings for this thesis were:

- A correlation between a person’s economic standard of living and feelings of loneliness, an association which increased for older people.
- A strong relationship between living alone and feelings of loneliness. This was most prominent in young people and people in midlife.
- Being a recent migrant was associated with loneliness for people in midlife.
- Older people were less likely to feel lonely when they lived in a two-person household as opposed to a larger household.
- Overall, young adults had a greater likelihood of feeling lonely. 7

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3 “Quality of Life Survey,” (Auckland, NZ2014), 130.
4 “Loneliness in New Zealand.”
5 Ibid., 6.
6 Ibid., 5.
7 Ibid.
These patterns of social issues around Wellbeing are not only present in New Zealand, but also throughout other Western Countries. Charles Montgomery, an award winning urbanist from Canada who focuses on human well-being, talks about the impact of social isolation in the neighbourhoods of Swiss Cities in his book ‘Happy City’. He found that cities with the thinnest social networks were also the cities with the highest rates of psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia.

“Social isolation just may be the greatest environmental hazard of city living...worse than noise, pollution or overcrowding”.

– Charles Montgomery

New Zealanders are known to be very independent people. If we take a second objectively analyse the way we live in our homes, our streets, and our cities, it should not be surprising that our performance in the areas of community connections and close relationships fall below the mark. To understand this further we can look back at some of the findings from the Quality of life survey mentioned earlier.

For this architectural thesis the areas I paid specific attention to were:

- The importance of a Sense of Community
- Existing Sense of Community
- Varying levels of contact with people in the neighbourhood
- The trust we place in other people: introducing the concept of ‘social capital’.
The Importance of a Sense of Community
According to the Quality of life survey 3 out of every 4 people (75%) agree it is important to feel a sense of community with the people in their local neighbourhood. Interestingly this perception does not change in relation to ethnicity or income; however it does decrease to only 57% for people under the age of 25.9

The Quality of life survey also showed that apart from households who earn under $20,000 per year, the more that New Zealanders earn, the less likely that people will ‘feel a sense of community’. 59% of people in Auckland either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of community, but this percentage decreased to 52% as income rose.11 This is in line with the findings of a separate study by a team of Italian economists, mentioned in Charles Montgomery’s’ book ‘Happy City’, which found that “the more money you earn the less likely you are to feel a sense of community”.12

Existing Sense of Community
Only 51% of people in Auckland actually feel a sense of community in their local area, and this perception decreased to 34% in relation to age and to 45% for people of Asian/Indian ethnicity. The main reasons for this listed in the report were:

- People considered themselves to be too busy
- A lack of communication with others in the neighbourhood
- A preference for socializing with other people
- An absence of events within the neighbourhood.10

Figure 5 - 3 out of 4 people feel a sense of community

9 “Quality of Life Survey,” 105.
10 Ibid., 103.
11 Ibid., 105.
12 Montgomery, The Broken Social Scene, 54.
“The only factor powerful enough to hold down people’s self-reported happiness in the face of increasing wealth was the country’s declining social capital” – Stefano Bartolini
Varying levels of contact with people in the neighborhood in the last 12 months
Data was collected to analyse different levels of contact as described below:

- A strong positive contact such as support of a close friendship (such as having BBQs or drinks together)
- Positive contact (a visit, or asking each other for small favours)
- Some positive contact (a nod or saying hello)

The survey found that only 38% of people in Auckland had experienced ‘Strong positive contact’ in the last 12 months. This decreased to 24% for people under the age of 25 and was also at a low 25% for people of Asian/Indian ethnicity. This percentage increased to 45% with age, or if you were of Maori or Pacific ethnicity. Interestingly, income had little to no effect in this category.14

Figure 6 - Strong positive contact

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14 “Quality of Life Survey,” 110.
The amount of ‘positive’ contact was higher in Auckland at 68%, but again decreased to 46% in the under 25 category, though this increased to 77% with age. Interestingly, people of European ethnicity were more likely to have positive contact, while Maori and Pacific ethnicity were less likely. A big difference could also be seen in relation to income in this category, as people who earned over $100,000 were more likely to experience strong positive contact (75%).

The majority of people (93%) in Auckland do manage to achieve ‘Some positive contact’, achieving at least a nod to a fellow neighbour within the last 12 months. The under 25 group decreased slightly again to 86% with the other groups within 5% of the average either way. It is important to note that even at the average of 93%, this still implies that over 80,000 people failed to interact with a neighbour at the simplest level of acknowledgement.

From these findings on Neighbourhood contact we can conclude the following:

- Across all levels of neighbourly contact, people under 25 are less likely to connect with people in their neighbourhood.
- People of Asian/Indian ethnicity are more likely to struggle to make more meaningful forms of contact; however they perform much better with simple forms of acknowledgement.
- Income had little effect on people’s ability to form strong positive forms of contact, however those who earned over $100,000 were more likely to have positive contact with their neighbours (asking for small favours, etc.)
- As people got older, they became better at connecting with their neighbours across all levels of neighbourly contact.

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15 Ibid., 113.
16 Ibid., 110-29.
17 Ibid.
The relationships that we have with our neighbours, the friendships we build over time, and how close we keep our families and our partners are invisible but significant influences on our well-being.

Montgomery also talks about an economist called John Helliwell who researched ‘happiness economics’, and found that “when it comes to life satisfaction, relationships with other people beat income, hands down”. His study found that going from having no friends to just one or even a family member to confide in had the same effect on life satisfaction as a person’s income being tripled.18

This isn’t a new concept. Over 250 years ago the importance of social relationships was evident to Adam Smith, a Scottish philosopher who argued in his treatise ‘The Theory of Moral Sentiments’ (1759) that Human conscience comes from social relationships, and that natural empathy produced by being among other people is an essential part of well-being and should guide our actions.19

The trust we place in other people
The last point I wanted to focus on is the issue of New Zealander’s trust in other people. It is widely accepted in literature that the wellbeing of individuals is a significant function of ‘social capital’. As Montgomery describes it, individual happiness (contentment) is an inter-dependent element in the development of social capital, and that social capital is essential to a fully functioning society.20

63% of people across Auckland feel that, in general, people can be trusted. This means that nearly 4 out of every 10 people interact with others with the perception that they either ‘almost always or usually can’t be too careful in dealing with others’.21

Various research shows people are losing the ties they had within their neighbourhood communities, and that there has been a large decline in social connection worldwide. We are becoming increasingly solitary, with great implications for our wellbeing.22

18 Montgomery, “The City Has Always Been a Happiness Project,” 36.
19 Smith, quoted in Montgomery,39
21 “Quality of Life Survey,” 134.
22 Montgomery, The Broken Social Scene, 54.
Studies consistently link love, friendship, and social relationships, to the quality of a person’s wellbeing, and state that the ‘need to belong’ is a basic human motive (e.g. Ryff 1995; Reis & Gable 2003; Diener & Diener McGraven 2008). The statistics above make one thing clear: many New Zealanders have comparably low levels of wellbeing. There is a large portion of people who feel isolated and lonely, find it difficult to form relationships, or fail to connect with their neighbourhood community, which in essence can be understood as a lack of wellbeing. Before we can begin to make any kind of recommendations to address the problem, we need to make sure we address the roots of the problem, and not purely the symptoms. To do this I will further discuss wellbeing to gain a deeper understanding of what it really is, compared to what people generally interpret it to be.

“As much as we complain about other people, there is nothing worse for mental health than a social desert”.24

Charles Montgomery


24 Montgomery, The Broken Social Scene, 54.
2.2 WHAT IS WELLBEING?  
HOW WE UNDERSTAND IT

Like any concept in sociological sciences, the theory of wellbeing and the major approaches to measuring it have evolved over time. Only until very recently has the research and discussions on the topic resulted in a more in-depth understanding, with the number of published papers increasing from less than ten per year during the 1960’s, to more than 2000 annually in the last 10 years.25

Orthodox neo-classical economics historically measured wellbeing based on a person’s ability to meet their wants and desires, also known as ‘preference satisfaction’. This can be understood by the idea that a larger income will result in being able to attain more of your desires. Over time this approach was challenged, and through various studies it was found that an increase in income had a positive effect on wellbeing only when measuring ‘life satisfaction’, as opposed to ‘happiness’.26

Although both types of studies are considered to be ‘studies of wellbeing’, the difference between them is critical.

Research on life satisfaction focuses on how an individual ‘thinks their life is going’ with findings showing that life satisfaction is strongly related to the attainment of material things or ‘economic prosperity’.27 Studies on happiness, however, are concerned with how an individual ‘feels now’. These conclude that people associate happiness with immaterial things, once they are financially able to cover their most basic needs.28 It is the importance placed on the attainment of material over immaterial things which is negatively affecting levels of wellbeing in westernised countries.

Findings from a study conducted in New Zealand further support the lack of association between material things and wellbeing.29 The study surveyed materialism and found that New Zealand was performing unexpectedly badly when compared to 12 other countries, in fact scoring “the third highest in materialism after Romania and U.S.A”.30

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26 Roberts et al., «The Nature of Wellbeing: How Nature’s Ecosystem Services Contribute to the Wellbeing of New Zealand and New Zealanders.»
27 Ibid., 17.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 7.
The foundation of this study was based on past research by Kasser and Ryan in 1993, 1996, and 2001, who stated that “what people pursue as a life goal is strongly related to how happy or satisfied they feel about their lives”. Otago students Yamaguchi and Halberstadt accepted this to be true and surveyed 97 students from Otago University to assess the existence of both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. They did this by asking a series of questions relating to the attainment of extrinsic and intrinsic goals.

To explain the two wellbeing concepts briefly, ‘hedonic’ wellbeing is subjective. It can be understood by the attainment of pleasure and avoidance of pain, and is based on achieving an individual’s own desires. ‘Eudaimonic’ wellbeing on the other hand is considered to be more than attaining one’s own desires, but achieving a ‘positive desirable condition’. Eudaimonia differentiates itself from hedonism by striving to ‘do good’ instead of only doing what ‘feels good’.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic goals can be simply understood as external or internal. Extrinsic goals could include goals such as financial success, fame, or physical attractiveness, while intrinsic goals are associated instead with developing oneself as a better person, having meaningful relationships with others, and being of service to one’s community.

The results from this study found that more importance was placed on intrinsic goals compared to extrinsic ones, and although intrinsic goals were considered to be more difficult to pursue they also resulted in greater success and satisfaction once achieved. The study also found that “intrinsic goals strongly predicted both eudaimonic and, somewhat unexpectedly, some hedonic wellbeing, while extrinsic goals predicted neither.”

What we can learn about wellbeing from this study is extremely insightful and relevant when proposing any kind of intervention with the intent of addressing social wellbeing. Across all 97 students surveyed, there was no correlation between extrinsic goals and any kind of well-being; hedonic or eudaimonic. For a country that is considered to be one of the most materialistic countries amongst 12 others, this is a huge insight into understanding the inconsistency between people’s perception of achieving wellbeing and how wellbeing is actually achieved.

Following this, improving wellbeing is then about prioritizing intrinsic goals over extrinsic and focusing on fulfilling one’s innate psychological needs, such as personal growth and self-actualization, in order to achieve a more eudaimonic sense of wellbeing.

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 8.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
ARISTOTLE’S IDENTIFICATION OF HEDONIC AND EUDAIMONIC STATES OF EXISTENCE

Aristotle proposed that to truly ‘flourish’ as a human being it is critical to have a sense of wellbeing, and to Aristotle ‘flourishing’ was the point of human life. It is what guides your actions and leads you to a fulfilling life. But Wellbeing, also known as ‘Eudaimonia’, was only one of three critical elements to human flourishing, alongside ‘Association and Friendship,’ and ‘Creativity’. According to him these three elements can only function as a whole, therefore all three must be understood and achieved in order to flourish as a human.\(^{38}\)

First Element - Eudaimonia

Aristotle uses the term ‘Eudaimonia’ instead of wellbeing, defining it as a ‘positive desirable condition’ and something that can only be achieved internally. He explains that the desirable condition ‘Eudaimonia’ cannot be achieved by only doing what ‘feels good’ as sometimes an action that might feel good to an individual can also have a negative effect on other people, society or the environment. To achieve Eudaimonia you need to ‘feel good’ and also ‘do good’: you must have a positive effect on one’s self, other people, society, or the environment.\(^{39}\)

Second Element – Association and Friendship

A sense of attachment to others is another important element in human flourishing. Contemporary conditions often work against the development of these relationships, making it very difficult to generate mutual sympathy between people.\(^{40}\)

To understand this element it is necessary to understand Aristotle’s ‘virtues’. ‘Friendship’ is one of his primary virtues - which is where the elements of flourishing start to overlap. The chief ingredient in Eudaimonia is virtue, and it is understood that a person cannot do good acts unless they have it. Therefore, it follows that wellbeing originates from actions based upon, or in accordance with, virtue. Friendship was one such action, so to Aristotle it is an essential component of a flourishing life.\(^{41}\)

“Nobody would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other good things”. (Aristotle, 1953:bk.10, ch.6; quoted in Paul Hopper, 2003, p.130)\(^{42}\)

\(^{38}\) Paul Hopper, “Rebuilding Communities,” in Rebuilding Communities in an Age of Individualism (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 130.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 134.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 135.
Our existence is incomplete without the relationships we have with others and the resulting feelings of affection. Aristotle has an interesting view of the bonds of friendship and the bond between citizens or members in a community. To him, this relationship is the beginning of the creation of any city, town, or village, and he explains this as being different to the friendship between two people, but also to mean that no person can belong only to themselves. Everyone is attached to others as a part of the whole community of the state.43

“And it is not right...that any of the citizens should think that he belongs to himself; he must regard all citizens as belonging to the state, for each is a part of the state; and the responsibility for each part naturally has regard to the responsibility for the whole.”44 - Aristotle

Third Element – Creativity

Aristotle talks about the importance of having ‘the use of our creative abilities’ and how this contributes towards the concept of ‘flourishing’. It is about people being able to develop their particular talents and capabilities – having the opportunity to be inventive and imaginative.45

In the capitalist society of today, creativity has been significantly reduced. Where people used to work to ‘create something’, now they work to create something for somebody else, with the purpose of earning enough money to live their life and function in society. Creativity has also been taken away at home, with cookie cutter homes, replicated townhouses and the increasing difficulty for many to buy their own home.46

Using this analysis we can argue that wellbeing levels are low in New Zealand, and we can also understand the nature of wellbeing and how it is, and isn’t, achieved. With this compact summary of what constitutes wellbeing in mind, I will next discuss the pattern of events that has contributed to New Zealander’s decline in the international standings.

2.3 HOW DID THIS HAPPEN AND WHAT ARE WE DOING WRONG?

When the wellbeing of at least 1 million people is not what it should be, it is not enough to say that fault lies with the people and their individual circumstances. The focus for discussion should not be on what each individual is doing wrong, but instead on how this happened collectively, and what the major factors which influence our wellbeing are. Although numerous factors could be identified, I will briefly discuss the three most critical ones:

- New Zealand Culture
- Evolution of Societal Structures
- Government Structure

New Zealand Culture
Firstly when I am talking about New Zealand culture, I am referring to our strong ties to individualism, the relationships we have with others, our general attitude towards accepting help, and the desire we have to make it on our own and be successful.

New Zealand is considered to be an individualistic society, rather than a collectivist one. This means that we tend to only look after ourselves and direct family members, as opposed to collectivist societies where people are part of a group and take care of each other in exchange for loyalty. In fact, research shows that we actually live in one of the most individualistic societies in the world. An extensive study by Professor Geert Hofstede examined how different values are influenced by culture, and New Zealand placed 7th out of over 100 other countries on a scale measuring individualism.

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.

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Figure 8 - Each for their own
You know, the world just isn't meeting my needs right now.
Some would argue that our individualism is part of what defines us as New Zealanders, and paradoxically, that our individualistic culture is partially responsible for low levels of wellbeing. A study on how both individualism and collectivism are related to happiness was undertaken by John F. Helliwell, Haifang Huang and Shun Wang, and found that collectivistic societies are a lot happier. This study also stated that “people get happiness not just from doing things with others, but from doing things both with and for others.”

Another study on Collectivism across different ethnicities in New Zealand found that “New Zealand Europeans are the least collective group when compared against Maori, Chinese and Pacific Islanders”, and that the more ‘collective traits’ existed within family relations the less ‘individualistic attitudes’ were displayed towards friends and strangers.

New Zealand is also generally understood to have a strong ‘just harden up’ culture.

Auckland Council can be seen describing Waitakere residents in this manner, saying that they generally have a “step up and get on with it attitude”. However, this type of attitude is having a negative effect on wellbeing in the way that it enforces the ‘task’ to take priority over any other factor and puts pressure on others to follow suit.

I have experienced this type of pressure first-hand in the workplace, not only from management but also co-workers, to ‘tough it out’ or ‘push through’ if sick or injured. The lack of empathy for people outside of the specific task they have been assigned and are being paid to do is alarming. This type of attitude towards others stems from our individualistic nature and the focus we place on our own economic success.

To understand why economic success has taken priority over wellbeing, we need to look at the evolution of societal structures and understand the effect modernisation and industrialisation has had on us from a wellbeing perspective.

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Evolution of social structures

The way in which social structures have evolved over time can be understood by German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies and his two categorical concepts of human association, gemeinschaft and gesellschaft. Tonnies' interest was in the loss of gemeinschaft relationships post-industrialisation and urbanisation, and the effect this had on communities.

Gemeinschaft societies prioritise human relationships and the welfare of the group over the welfare of an individual. It is most commonly seen in social structures such as the family, village, or tribe, where property tends to be communal. Due to the similarities between individuals, shared beliefs, and a collective sense of loyalty, behaviour is more easily predictable which results in little need to enforce any kind of social control. People in this environment remain linked despite of their distinctions, with a resounding sense of social capital and social cohesion.

Gesellschaft societies on the other hand have very few shared interests and beliefs, and place importance on the individual over the collective. Through the rise of individualism, the linking factors from gemeinschaft societies can be seen to wither away as the desire to break away from the norm and be ‘different’ grows. As Tonnies explains, “Gesellschaft implies a circle of men who live and dwell in peace, one beside the other, but instead of being essentially joined are on the contrary essentially separated”.

Actions are driven by an individual’s self-interest and there exists little sense of loyalty towards society. A relatable example of this can be found in a modern business, where the majority of an individual’s self-interest lies in the prospect of making money.

“Nobody is able to make anything for another unless it is in exchange for a similar service, or compensation, that he judges to be equivalent to that which he has given.”

Tonnies viewed Gemeinschaft societies as a symbol of the past, and a better time, and Gesellschaft societies as what we are predominantly

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55 Ibid., 1195.
56 Ibid.
Figure 10 - Gemeinschaft representation
familiar with today. He placed the blame for this shift in societal structure on the rise of modernity, industrialisation and individualism. To Tonnies, the importance of community was being neglected and instead replaced with rational comprehensive planning.57 Others during his time also made this connection, but didn’t necessarily see it as a negative. Sociologist Louis Wirth proposed that the self-contained neighbourhood community was no longer a viable option in the face of modernism, and that any efforts to restore social ties would be an effort against progress and the modern ways of urban society.58 Le Corbusier also believed that “In the city of Modernity there was no place for localism and community”.59

Contemporary planning orthodoxy started to be questioned in the 1960’s after the repercussions of modernism became evident. Jane Jacobs stood against rational planning because she believed that the replacement of neighbourhoods with large scale utopian developments “left more social problems in their wake than they solved”,60 and that the role of the existing and how it contributed to society was completely ignored through rational planning.61

Upon realisation that our societal structures were very quickly shifting from a gemeinschaft to a gesellschaft paradigm, and that the new architectural and town planning approach was further enforcing this transformation, it became evident that the orthodox approach needed to be reassessed from a social perspective.

58 Ibid., 2.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 3.
61 Ibid.
Gemeinschaft type societies had not been completely eradicated in the face of modernism, and through two famous case studies - Young and Williams’ demonstration of Bethnal Green in East London, and Herbert Gans’ in the West end of Boston - they found two overarching themes that when present allowed a sense of community to exist in modern urban villages. These were:

- When people occupied common territory
- When people and their families had lived there a long time.

Although social concerns are taken into account when designing and planning today, the amount of shared spaces and the consideration given to designing neighbourhoods for all phases of life is still not a shared focus for many people. It should be understood that the built environment is not responsible for the gesellschaft dominated societies, but rather a symptom of modernisation, industrialisation and individualism.

Through awareness and understanding of the impacts of these, we can respond accordingly to compensate for what has been lost.

One way this compensation could be approached is to look at what qualities encourage a ‘gemeinschaft ambience’. Some of these characteristics were discovered by a study on the Finish New Town of Tapiola. Tapiolans found their new surroundings to be more gemeinschaft-like than where they lived previously, by almost a two to one margin. They were also considered to be more active at the local level, and 72% of their residents belonged to either a special interest or sport group. This study concluded that to overcome the strong sense of individualism and the vast differences between people, Tapiola created ‘ONE homogeneous middle class community’. This was done through political and social participation which successfully de-emphasized typical differences (types of employment, income and education) previously separating people, and encouraged a gemeinschaft social structure.


64 Ibid., 148.
Another way to compensate for the negative effects of a gesellshcaft dominated society is to embrace individualism, accept our differences and increase awareness of the dependence we have on one another. This is in line with Emile Durkheim’s concepts of organic and mechanical solidarity, which are inherently similar to Tonnies social concepts. Durkheim however held a more optimistic perspective on Modern society which he called ‘Organic Solidarity’. Durkheim saw modern society as a direct result of specialisations within the division of labour. A shift in the way people connect occurred during this time; rather than connecting by their similarities, they connected through their differences. Small societies were no longer self-sufficient, and although the collective consciousness decreased, reliability and dependence on one another increased. To Durkheim this was the only way to understand how people are connected in Modern Societies: through a very natural ‘Organic Solidarity’. Durkheim’s approach can help to express the nature of how we are truly connected in modern individualistic societies. It is when there is a lack of awareness of our dependence on one another that the strength of our connection is strained. Through an architectural intervention, awareness of how we are connected has the potential to strengthen this connection to others through mutual understanding, increased respect for other specialisations, and a sense of reliance on others to participate in society.

Societal and Economic Pressures
Lastly, a portion of our low levels of wellbeing can be attributed to the societal and economic pressures individuals are subjected to. As a society we measure progress through “economic growth” and material wealth, both of which are pursuits of extrinsic goals that provide neither a hedonistic nor eudaimonic sense of wellbeing. This becomes a problem because as a result of societies needs being driven by the market, we are mistakenly taught and encouraged to believe that our wellbeing is dependent on economic factors.

Figure 12 - Societal Balance
2.4 WELLBEING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Today, it is generally accepted that there is a strong link between the quality of the built environment and wellbeing, and that it can positively or negatively influence an individual or community. Some of the studies of this relationship are:

- A John Hopkins University in Baltimore study that found that the design of a neighbourhood affects sense of community.\(^{67}\)
- Research conducted by the ‘HALCyon study team’, who found a relationship between neighbourhood characteristics and wellbeing.\(^{68}\)
- A study across several Universities in the USA which found a strong link between the quality of the built environment and depressive symptoms.\(^{69}\) Research by Interior architects Dianne Smith, Pyria Metcalfe and Marina Lommerse which argues that interior architecture offers a sense of belonging to an individual, family and community.\(^{70}\)

These papers support the idea that the built environment influences mood and atmosphere, enables self-expression, facilitates interaction, and influences the image and identity of oneself and their community. Professor Koen Steemers, from the University of Cambridge, looked more closely at the relationship between architecture and wellbeing in his article “Architecture for Well Being and Health”.

The UK Government identified ‘Five ways to wellbeing’ (To Connect, Keep Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, and Give), which Steemers set as objectives in order to recommend several changes that can be made to the built environment at the neighbourhood scale, in an effort to enhance wellbeing.\(^71\)

His suggestions are:

- Encourage the development of higher density mixed use developments
- Increase the availability of diverse open public space (ensuring that private gardens aren’t prioritised over public spaces)
- Provide communal facilities
- Ensure there is an adequate threshold between home and neighbourhood, which will provide sufficient separation and privacy. He makes a recommendation to achieve this through vegetation to also increase human contact with nature.
- Increased views of the neighbourhood and nature which can be achieved through thoughtful design, low window sills and openable windows.\(^72\)

Steemers also explains in his professional opinion that our attempt to design ‘the perfect building’, has come at the cost of designing spaces which don’t encourage occupants to be active, aware and engaged. He believes that designs need to ‘nudge people into positive behaviours’.\(^73\)

This position is supported by Professor Elizabeth Burton, a leading researcher at the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development. She talks about how architects and designers have been placing too much importance on designing ‘the perfect building’, ‘being original’, and ‘doing something new’. This focus has led to a lack of consideration for achieving social and cultural needs.\(^74\)

However, there is no single clear cut way that the built environment can improve wellbeing. Rather, there needs to be a set of ethical values driving design decisions, formed by our ability to make decisions in the interest of others and broadly related to accessibility and quality of place.

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72 Ibid.  
73 Ibid.  
Some examples of how our planning and design decisions can shape wellbeing are:

- The allowance for parked cars which can separate neighbours, and block physical and visual access.
- The amount of public space that is made available and the functionality of it will directly relate to how well it is used amongst a group of people.
- The detailed design of thresholds between public and private which can encourage or discourage social interactions.
- The location and placement of shops and public spaces can either promote activity or create unsafe spaces.
- Within the house, certain layouts and orientations can encourage or discourage social isolation from other household members and the community.

**Accessibility to the outdoors**

Burton found it to be hugely important to connect people to the outdoors as easily as possible, especially later in life. A large portion of her research looks at how outdoor environments impact the quality of life and well-being of older people, the results of which indicate that; “The design of Britain’s gardens, streets, neighbourhoods and open spaces affect older people’s ability to age well and live independently by supporting, or preventing, access for all”. It also concluded that those who are unable to easily get outdoors are more likely to “spiral into poor physical health, less social contact with others and a reduced quality of life overall”.

“If an older person cannot get out and about locally, they are at risk of becoming a prisoner in their own home”.

*Elizabeth Burton*

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76 Ibid.
Sense of place
In his peer reviewed study, Howard Frumkin explores the importance of creating a good ‘sense of place’, and talks about how there is plenty of evidence on how to build a ‘good place’ in the literature of architecture, art and design. He discusses an architectural experiment conducted in Ulrich, at a hospital in Pennsylvania, which provided statistical evidence supporting the idea that trees are a part of ‘place’. The experiment consisted of comparing patients who were given rooms with tree views, compared to those who had the view of a brick wall outside their window. Those who had tree views had significantly shorter hospitalizations (7.96 days vs 8.7 days), as well as less need for pain medications and fewer negative notes by nurses.

Jane Jacobs also talks about the importance of having a ‘sense of place’. In her words, it’s about how “people need to have a ‘place’ to belong to...a place where people would act more decent to each other because everybody would have the right to be there”.

“Belonging to groups that provide us with a sense of place, purpose and belonging tends to be good for us psychologically and can buffer wellbeing when it is threatened.”

78 Ibid.
My own experience of sense of place

In my own experience, I was most able to feel a sense of belonging or experience a strong ‘sense of place’ in public spaces in close proximity to my home.

When I visited the local park at the end of my street to walk my dog, it was common to bump into someone, and even if I didn’t already recognise them as a neighbour, it was always easier to exchange conversation. The park acted as ‘mutual ground’ to which we both belonged to. There was a large pine tree at the centre and a seat just around the corner dedicated to a local couple who had passed 3 years ago. It was all part of ‘my park’, and also my neighbour’s park. - It was easier to connect with people at this place.

“Some places are romantic, some places are depressing. There are places that are confusing, places that are peaceful, places that are frightening, and places that are safe. We like some places better than others. Place matters.”

— Howard Frumkin

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2.5 WHAT EFFORTS ARE CURRENTLY BEING MADE TO IMPROVE WELLBEING?

The government’s response to the issues around wellbeing and social isolation are outlined by Auckland Council in a report on the ‘Social issues and priorities for Auckland’. The report outlines four critical responses:

- **Resources need to be combined** – Governments need to work together to combine resources so that there is less red tape, and helping the people is prioritised. Becoming involved also needs to be encouraged, as it has been found that people generally want to take part in matters that concern them, and that government actions will always be better received if communities are more involved.

- **Importance of place shaping** – Good urban planning, especially in the suburbs. Places where people want to be should be more of a focus during planning and design.

- **Strong use of community engagement**. – Local government can have more of a role to help people to feel involved in the change of their own neighbourhoods.

- **Using core business to work with communities** – Local government can be more thoughtful to the placement of their core businesses to help communities thrive.82

The report also mentions that contributions from city authorities are not sufficient, and that the basic needs of many people are not being met. It highlights that more needs to be done, but does not outline how.

An example of an intervention that Auckland Council is currently addressing is the regeneration of the Tamaki suburb. They have called it ‘the greatest urban transformation project in New Zealand’, and a ‘plan with a social and community focus’.

Interventions in existing neighbourhoods are generally easily addressed due to patterns of ownership, but due to the majority of properties being owned by Housing New Zealand in Tamaki, this was a great opportunity to set a precedent for suburban repair.

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83 Ibid.
An analysis
This plan improves on the existing with the incorporation of an early childhood education facility, walking paths, new homes, a small park, and traffic calming initiatives which are all beneficial to the health of the wider community. The plan for Tamaki is to act as precedent for the ‘the greatest urban transformation’ with the focus on social issues, but there are further aspects to consider.

Aspects of the plan that can contribute to a stronger community:
- Housing facing towards the park and green spaces
- Access points leading to the walking path
- Transformation of community hub

Design proposals in the plan that weaken the community:
- Shared courtyards will be used as carparks due to these being the only point of access to some properties
- Balance between private spaces and public - Nearly all the land has been allocated as low density, single attached housing with very little public space. An alternative could have been to allocate more public spaces with some medium density housing.
- Minimal integration of the existing - Some of the existing housing is kept, due to private ownership, and has been designed around instead of incorporated. This will not act as a good model for other regeneration projects.
- The walking path is a destination in itself instead of acting as a route from one destination to another.
- Streets are car focused; pedestrian systems are not integrated with new street layouts.

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2.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

International studies and statistics confirm that the wellbeing of New Zealanders is not achieving a high standard. Our own statistics show a high proportion of people who feel isolated, lonely and who struggle to connect with others.

We understand that not even a hedonistic sense of wellbeing can be achieved through extrinsic goals and material gain; it is in our interest to work towards achieving a ‘eudaimonic’ sense of wellbeing through the attainment of intrinsic goals. But achieving eudaimonia is only the first of three steps. To truly understand how to achieve wellbeing, or as Aristotle put it, to ‘flourish as a human being’, we also need to form bonds of association and friendship, and to have the opportunity to express ourselves creatively.

Achieving wellbeing cannot be the sole responsibility of the individual, as there are other factors outside of anyone’s control. These influential factors are our individualistic culture, the shift of societal structures in New Zealand from a gemeinschaft paradigm to a gesellschaft paradigm, and policies for social development adopted at government level for many decades.

It is worrying that current efforts to address this issue from an architectural or urban planning perspective are barely apparent, as can be seen in a critique of the Tamaki neighbourhood plan. This has the potential to create new problems: trying to address the issue by surrounding existing housing with new developments, the plans will risk creating an unsatisfactory and disruptive contrast between the old and the new.

Research informs us that the relationship between architecture and wellbeing is well within our realm to address. If anything we should feel a sense of responsibility toward the impact of an intervention beyond a client’s individual aims. Our responsibility lies with understanding more about human nature and human wellbeing and using this knowledge to create opportunities to help people, without hurting others.

86 Yamaguchi and Halberstadt, “Goals and Wellbeing in New Zealand.”
87 Hopper, “Rebuilding Communities,” 134.
From my findings I have come to the conclusion that an imbalance has occurred across several scales, and if design can be approached in accordance with rectifying this imbalance then wellbeing levels will improve.
These are:

- **THE RESTORATION OF THE BALANCE BETWEEN GESELLSCHAFT TYPE SOCIETIES AND GEMEINSCHAFT TYPE SOCIETIES**

- **THE RESTORATION OF THE BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM**

- **A REDIRECTION OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION - The way by which we express ourselves creatively needs to be adjusted from encouraging individualism, towards creating opportunities for people to express themselves creatively in their home and neighbourhood.**
3.0 SITE

3.1 SITE SELECTION
The main criteria I had for selecting a site was that it should represent a ‘typical’ Auckland suburb. Some of the qualities I looked for were: limited access to shops and public transport, a ‘local’ park nearby, a mixture of straight and windy streets, and various housing typologies and building ages. I selected an area in Northern New Lynn, due to the relevance of the proposed increase in density specifically for this area, the slightly higher proportion of migrants and elderly residents who have been identified as being more susceptible to social isolation, as well as the issues around existing housing stock in need of an upgrade.
Figure 19 - Kelston to New Lynn Amenities
Site area
35673m²

No. of Dwellings
74

Density
(dwelling per hectare)
20dph

Density
(habitable rooms per hectare)
69
Figure 29 - Land usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Space</td>
<td>2429m2</td>
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<td>Wasted Space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Driveways &amp; Parking</td>
<td>6960m2</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Buildings</td>
<td>1527m2</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dwellings</td>
<td>8245m2</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Space</td>
<td>12160m2</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.0 PRECEDENTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Transforming existing neighbourhoods typical of densities between 10 and 13dph to 30-40dph is a lot more challenging when trying to retain as much of the existing as possible. There aren’t many examples of people collectively improving their neighbourhood other than efforts around street scaping, re-zoning for new buildings, and council initiatives such as the Tamaki scheme. However, there are examples of unique spatial design and good medium density developments within neighbourhoods which are worth analysing to not just understand good and bad practices, but also to look at the schemes from a different perspective to see the how design could influence wellbeing.  

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88 David Turner et al., *Best Practice in Medium Density Housing* (Auckland, NZ: Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2004).
4.2 CHARLES CORREA

BELAPUR HOUSING
1983-1986
New Bombay
Charles Correa

CORREAS’ APPROACH:
Correa’s plan for New Bombay was to achieve high densities with low rise courtyard homes, using simple materials at a human scale. This was done with an incremental approach, starting with a courtyard 8 x 8m in size and followed by 7 houses which were built around the courtyard. Buildings did not share party walls, which allowed each family to extend and adapt their own house independently. This scheme also relied on the idea that if people are building their own house, they are more likely to get it done as quickly as possible, which helped to move the development along. Once a cluster of 7 houses surrounding a courtyard was completed, this pattern could be continued to group three clusters together forming a larger shared space between each. The pattern could then be replicated to form larger and larger community spaces.89

BELAPUR VS AUCKLAND
The way in which Charles Correa has addressed the relationship between public and private space is one which might seem foreign to New Zealanders. Correa has created 4 different types of spaces in the form of a private courtyard, small shared courtyard, a larger communal courtyard and a larger public space. In New Zealand’s typical suburbia, space typologies is fairly limited to public and private, with the public spaces typically consisting of roads and poorly accessible parks.

Correa’s method to arranging space prioritises fairness, community and flexibility in order to ensure that there is no hierarchy to separate people, that people have access to other and that they also have the ability to creatively express themselves through their home.

Although Correa’s concepts of incremental housing with very little vehicle access are not directly applicable to the existing suburban framework in New Zealand, the concept of organising and distributing space to achieve different levels of privacy has the potential to address some of the problems around seen around social isolation and separation in our typical suburbia.

New Zealand suburbia brings a whole new set of

design requirements, limitations and opportunities, which need to be considered, such as:

- The suburban mind-set of achieving high levels of privacy and a certain degree of control.
- The existing buildings which range in age and condition.
- Individual ownership of each property results in the likelihood that the selection of people wanting to participate in a scheme like this would be unorderly.

Before moving forward with the concept of space redistribution with varied levels of privacy, I have also looked at some of the best examples in Auckland which have prioritised achieving a strong sense of identity, sense of privacy and open public space. For each example I have conducted a conceptual analysis of their different qualities giving them a rating out of 5, along with an analysis of the way space is currently been distributed.

“Making housing is like a bird building its nest. You start with a basic house, but you have to let people change it to their own needs”.

- Charles Correa
BELAPUR HOUSING
SPACE ANALYSIS

Figure 32 - Belapur Space analysis
4.3 CASPIAN CLOSE

Caspian Close is a unique example in the way that it consists of single detached housing with a density of 29dph. It is considered to be the most stable when compared against 46 other higher density developments, with only 5% of homes changing ownership annually in the first 10 years. It is not entirely clear why this is, but it can’t be ignored that this medium density development has differentiated itself from others by allowing residents more freedom to do additions, and to add fences, garages, gardens, letterboxes – essentially, residents have the ability to creatively express themselves.

From a space distribution perspective, they have a highest amount of private space, and do not have any highly public space. This is due to the nature of their cul-de-sac which is predominantly only used by residents. As a drawback, Caspian close residents are less connected as a whole to their surroundings, but this disconnect has created a strong ‘pocket community’, where people seem to love living.

Figure 33 - Caspian Close culdesac  
Figure 34 - Caspian Close main street

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Figure 36 - Caspian close analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site area</th>
<th>No. of Dwellings</th>
<th>Density (dph)</th>
<th>Density (m²/unit)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9899m²</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30dph</td>
<td>309m²/unit</td>
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**Analysis**

- Shared Space
- Vehicle Access and Parking
- Pedestrian Access
- Identity
- Privacy
- Security
- Dwelling Layout
- Park Access
CASPIAN CLOSE
SPACE ANALYSIS

Figure 37 - Caspian close space analysis
4.4 TUSCANY WAY

The two housing developments on Tuscany Way have very efficient house plans with vehicle access to the rear, pedestrian access at the front, as well as facing a park. Interestingly the space analysis shows a good proportion of private space, but on closer inspection, each dwelling only has a small highly useable space which is very private and accessible from their home, the remaining private space comprised of a lower quality which could be better described as ‘left over space’.

Figure 38 - Tuscany way dwellings 1

Figure 39 - Tuscany way dwellings 2
Figure 41 - Tuscany Way analysis

- Site area: 3539m²
- No. of Dwellings: 13
- Density (dph): 37dph
- Density (m²/unit): 272m²/unit

ANALYSIS

- Shared Space
- Vehicle Access and Parking
- Pedestrian Access
- Identity
- Privacy
- Security
- Dwelling Layout
- Park Access
4.5 CORBAN VILLAGE

The Corban village space analysis found that there was a good proportion of public space, but it was unfortunately poorly accessible for the majority of residents. Private space again consisted of a mixture of both high and low quality space, and vehicle access was the sole shared space between dwellings. Corban village does however have excellent vehicle access and parking, which has been organised to pull the majority of vehicles off the road and tuck them into vehicle access lanes, in turn creating a more pedestrian friendly environment on the street. They also have an unusual sense of identity, with each medium density development showcasing their own strong identity. This does not create as much confusion as expected, and instead has resulted in quite a rich sense of character as each housing style fits well into the whole.
Figure 45 - Corban Village aerial
### Corban Village Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site area</th>
<th>No. of Dwellings</th>
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<th>Density (m²/unit)</th>
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<td>20686m²</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>40dph</td>
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**Analysis**

- [ ] Shared Space
- [ ] Vehicle Access and Parking
- [ ] Pedestrian Access
- [ ] Identity
- [ ] Privacy
- [ ] Security
- [ ] Dwelling Layout
- [ ] Park Access

*Figure 46 - Corban village analysis*
Figure 47 - Corban Village space analysis
4.6 TUSCANY TOWERS

Tuscany Towers has the highest proportion of shared semi-public space and the lowest proportion of private space. Similar to Caspian Close, this development has been successful in creating a sense of community, but at the cost of some disconnection from surrounding communities. Their private space is well organised, with a high ratio of high quality private space compared to low quality ‘left over’ space. Some of the issues identified with this development are that although they have achieved a high level of privacy and security from people outside of the area, these are not strong features within the development. The style of the buildings is also very consistent and leaves little room for change or individual creative expression.

They have however achieved efficient vehicle access and parking, by concreting over front gardens that would normally not be very useable and tucking cars down vehicle access lanes.92

Figure 48 - Tuscany Towers 1

Figure 49 - Tuscany Towers 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site area</th>
<th>No. of Dwellings</th>
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<th>Density (m²/unit)</th>
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<td>23071m²</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>42dph</td>
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**ANALYSIS**

- Shared Space
- Vehicle Access and Parking
- Pedestrian Access
- Identity
- Privacy
- Security
- Dwelling Layout
- Park Access

*Figure 51 - Tuscany Towers analysis*
Figure 52 - Tuscany Towers space analysis
OVERALL ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TUSCANY TOWERS</th>
<th>CORBAN VILLAGE</th>
<th>TUSCANY WAY</th>
<th>CASPIAN CLOSE</th>
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<tr>
<td>SHARED SPACE</td>
<td>4/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEHICLE ACCESS &amp; PARKING</td>
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<td>4/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEDESTRIAN ACCESS</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDENTITY</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>2/5</td>
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<td>SECURITY</td>
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<td>5/5</td>
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Figure 53 - Overall analysis
4.7 CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from these precedents which are most applicable to my site are regarding the way a sense of identity was achieved, vehicle access, and shared space or lack thereof.

A strong sense of identity was achieved in both Caspian Close and Corban Village both of which expressed a sense of individuality in design. The success of both of these precedents in relation to identity was also not going too far as to separate themselves from their neighbours. Caspian close has a strong architectural language in which they share similar, form and materiality, while Corban village has strong differences across building developments, but is successful in not creating a minority by having multiple dwellings in each building.

In both cases they still abide by the same language in relation to how space is used, vehicle access, and private space, which allows them to work together functionally and aesthetically.

In all cases, lessons can be learnt around vehicle access, specifically how pulling cars off the road and tucking them away can transform the street environment.

Lastly, although shared space wasn’t common, Tuscany Towers still made a large effort to prioritise it, the only criticism being the jump between the private and the public spaces.
5.0 DESIGN

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aspects of design that I will be discussing can be separated into 5 different sections; the density approach, a systems approach, pre-design, a design approach to spaces, and a design approach to housing. Each of these contributes towards achieving the three aims to wellbeing outlined in my summary of findings:

- The restoration of the balance between gesellschaft type societies and gemeinschaft type societies
- The restoration of the balance between individualism and collectivism
- A redirection of creative expression
5.2 DENSITY APPROACH
New Lynn is expected to soon experience a rapid
double increase in population due to the proposed Transit
Orientated Development plan which has a vision of
increasing the population from 5000 to 20,000 over the
next 14 years.\textsuperscript{93} The Auckland Unitary plan proposes a
density approach which focuses intensification in and
around the town centres and main roads, leaving our
typical suburban areas alone as much as possible. This is
described in the New Lynn master plan as a ‘carrot and
stick approach’.\textsuperscript{94} By halting initiative in the suburbs, and
making higher density developments more available,
it will speed up the transition of shifting people from
suburbia to more medium density housing typologies.

\textsuperscript{93} New Lynn Urban Plan 2010-2030 I.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
The biggest issue with this approach from a wellbeing perspective is in the abrupt nature of the transitioning. Given that the existing building typology typical of the newly zoned ‘terrace housing and apartments’ is ‘single detached houses’, developers will now not hesitate to maximise new developments, when and where they can, resulting in sporadic developments throughout quiet suburban streets. This has already started to result in the displacement and disruption of existing neighbourhoods, fuelling negative connotations towards density and development, and causing an up-rising against moving forwards.95 One of the ways this is seen is in the NIMBY (Not in my Backyard) movement. Since the Unitary Plan release, 9 of 20 councillors have voiced concern for their local areas, by writing to the Prime Minister urging him to slow down the process.96

The Unitary plan has outlined my selected site as a mixture of predominantly ‘mixed housing suburban’, with single housing zoned to the north and mixed housing urban to the south, showing a higher density allowance as you head further south towards the town centre. At this stage there is no allocation for an increase in public space, or an allowance for shops or businesses, anywhere other than the town centre 1.8km away.

We know for sure that the population is increasing, that we are going to need more housing and that the quality of our built environment has a strong influence on our wellbeing, as well as its ability to promote social behaviour. With this in mind, it is important to question if dictating such a disruptive jump in density is helping, or hurting, our wellbeing. Is there another way that would be more sympathetic to existing communities, give control back to the people, and still achieve the required densities?

My approach focuses on offering an alternative densification method which will prioritise the effect on individual and collective wellbeing. It is not necessarily an option to replace the unitary plan, but instead could work alongside it to reduce the impact of rapid intensification. A conceptual diagrammatic comparison is shown to the right:

---

5.3 SYSTEMS APPROACH

Restructure the system – Community title
Currently in typical suburbia there is very little public space, other than the roads and the occasional pocket park. Remaining land is private, and is divided into separate parcels with usually just a few metres between neighbouring buildings. This type of division between people who live in close proximity to each other is very much in line with a gesellschaft-type societal structure, with individualism at its core. Maximum privacy is the ultimate desire, and it is not uncommon for people to either not know their neighbours, or speak to them only when running into them while leaving or arriving.

Any effort made to intervene in the suburban condition with the intention of improving a wider area is almost impossible given the way our system functions around individual ownership. Our individualistic culture also makes collective change more difficult, as the majority of households will be quick to prioritise individual benefit over collective benefit.

If we want to move beyond street-scraping, fence heights and setbacks, an alternative option needs to be explored, one which will counter the individualistic tendencies preventing us away from achieving higher levels of wellbeing and allow us to decrease social isolation. To do this, I have explored an alternative method to the division of land:

The application of a community title
To discourage individualistic tendencies, the focus needs to be shifted from individual gain to a common interest, and the only way to nudge people into this kind of behaviour is to start with it being individually beneficial.

Figure 58 - Community Title vs Torrens
to think beyond oneself. This can be done through the application of a community title, where people legally share land, buildings and facilities. This approach has the potential to encourage community growth, social capital and provide various opportunities which were not available in the previous societal structure.

Has it worked before?
A research paper by Matthew Cooper from UNSW looked at whether community titles were an effective approach to improving sense of community and enhancing social capital. He found that there has been a general increase in master planned community estates in Australia with successful outcomes relating to enhancing social capital and community growth.98 These schemes were noticed by council and are now part of their own planning policies to encourage the establishment of Community titles within the middle and inner city areas of Australia.99

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98 Matthew Cooper, “Creating Communities: An Investigation of Community Title Schemes” (The University of New South Wales, 2006).
99 Ibid.

Figure 59 - Kellyville Ride
Cooper's study involved asking 26 people from Newbury estate - a community title scheme and 26 people from Kellyville Ridge – a typical Torrens title private sector development in Sydney. He found that community titles are effective ways of improving the sense of community and enhancing social capital. The residents from Newbury estate living under the community title scheme felt a stronger sense of community, even though the residents in Kellyville Ridge had resided there for a much longer period of time.

In Auckland, this type of scheme would have to be driven by the community and be a decision that they all agree upon. Given the housing issues in Auckland, a different solution would provide another path to improve quality of life and give a sense of control back to the people.

There are several examples of communities who have taken matters into their own hands. An example is the 1990's Vauban quarter development in Freiburg, Germany, where residents feared it was only a matter of time before they were removed by developers. To take back control, home owners worked with local government and through shared values and collective planning, Vauban is now considered to be an outstanding example of sustainable living, with 5000 inhabitants and over 600 jobs.

---

**Figure 60 - Sense of Community comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Newbury Estate</th>
<th>Kellyville Ridge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel part of the community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Definition of Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House and adjoining neighbours</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their street</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series of streets</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately happy</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Happy</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

100 Ibid.
Figure 61 - Solar settlement in the Vauban quarter in Freiburg
Another example is the ‘Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood’, a cohousing community driven initiative in Ranui. The group of people who came together to realise this project, shared similar values and successfully managed to create a well-connected community. The type of ownership used here is essentially a ‘community title’, where there is still individual ownership of the dwelling and private space along with the added shared ownership of communal facilities. However, due to the differences between this type of scheme and surrounding neighbourhoods, their efforts to connect have further separated their new community from people outside.

Figure 62 - Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood

Figure 63 - Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood master plan

The condition of the housing stock
The quality of our built environment – the conditions in which we are living – also heavily influence wellbeing. If a family lives in a home with poor insulation, a leaky roof, a couple windows that don’t shut properly and interior finishing’s that are in need of repair, their sense of wellbeing will be severely hindered. If the aim is to improve wellbeing in the suburbs, then the method also needs to create opportunities for upgrades.

One of the largest housing issues in New Zealand is that our homes are cold, damp, under insulated, and often poorly orientated. During our colder months, temperatures in living areas and bedrooms are typically around 6 degrees C below the minimum indoor temperature set by the World Health Organisation of 18 degrees C.\textsuperscript{103} Insulation levels in New Zealand are also falling below the mark, with more than 75% having insufficient ceiling insulation and over 70% with no floor insulation.\textsuperscript{104}

The option for the typical New Zealander to be able to pay for the necessary comprehensive upgrades to their home is becoming less and less realistic. Statistics show that household debt in New Zealand is reaching record levels in relation to household income at 162% of a household’s disposable income. This surpasses the peaks reached prior to the financial crisis.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Adrienne Kohler, “Unhealthy Living,” Architecture Now\textsuperscript{2012}.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ranchhod, “Household Debt Levels Now Higher Than before the Financial Crisis.”

The latest census data also predicts that the majority of people who are in debt now will still be in debt when they reach retirement age. The situation is considered worse in Auckland where it is found that we have the highest rate of homeowners still paying off their mortgages, and the lowest proportion who own their home mortgage free.\textsuperscript{106}

Although we can address housing concerns through new building legislation for new builds, the way we address our existing housing stock is not as easy as demolishing all and starting again.

\textsuperscript{106} Lane Nichols, “How Mortgage Numbers Stack Up,” New Zealand Herald \textsuperscript{2014}.
Participation and trade-offs
The viability of a regeneration scheme in a typical
neighbourhood is reliant on the homeowner’s ability to
financially participate, and whether or not the benefits
outweigh the temporary displacement. This type of
scheme cannot work on the assumption that each
household will have the funds to participate, or be
willing to increase their mortgage to do so.
However if we look at the opportunity that can be
created to address the quality of the existing housing
stock through the application of a community title
scheme, an upgrade for the typical New Zealander is
well within reach – no matter their financial situation.

How?
The typical situation for the majority of homeowners is
that they find themselves

asset rich and cash poor.

We also find ourselves in a situation where we have
low densities in the suburbs, an increasing population
and the only people in a position to benefit from this
entire situation are developers whose aim is to maximise
profit.

The situation can be understood as this:
1) People in suburbia have excess, unproductive
land
2) Their properties are in need of upgrades
3) Investors and developers need land to build
houses
4) Auckland Council wants the housing stock to
be upgraded, wellbeing to be improved, social
isolation to be decreased, and communities to
thrive.

Through a community title scheme, there is an
opportunity to improve how efficiently we use space
in the suburbs, bring the condition of our housing to
acceptable standards, create a pleasant environment
that people really want to ‘live’ in, along with the
opportunity of generating a communal income to
provide other benefits, such as ongoing maintenance.
The logistics of implementing a scheme of this nature
are complex, and requires the expertise from many
contributors. With this in mind, I have explored how this
could work at a conceptual level in order to build the
basis for design application.
How it would work
Currently individual lots consist of one dwelling on a section of land. If the four connecting properties shown below decided they wanted to look at the option of combining properties into a community title, then their land would be their contribution to the overall scheme. The value of their land could be used to pay for necessary upgrades and re-orientation if required. This could include a new roof, cladding, windows, wall, floor or roof insulation, new internal upgrade and in some cases a small addition. Each existing household would also get a private outdoor space and access to the communal amenities, some of which could be: semi private spaces shared amongst neighbouring dwellings, semi-public green spaces in close proximity, communal buildings, and an upgrade of the surrounding infrastructure.

If the house had to be demolished, the home owner would have their total CV value available for a new home within the new development plan in exchange for their section. The trade-off to allow this to happen is ultimately an increase in density across the selected neighbourhood area. Density is an issue that many people see as a negative, and this is because it is being implemented in an uncoordinated way. Through the approach of a community title scheme, the community will take back the control of when and how density happens in their neighbourhood. Density also has the potential to be seen in a positive light through the benefits of a better quality of life and improved wellbeing.
HOUSE VALUE + LAND VALUE = $340,000 TOWARDS NEW HOUSE WITHIN CLUSTER

NEW PRIVATE SPACE

LAND VALUE OF $165,000 EACH TOWARDS UPGRADE

Figure 65 - How it works
Pros of a Community Title approach

- Encourages a gemeinschaft ambience
- Decreases individualism and removes barriers
- Connects people through similarity and mutual interest
- Shared ownership of amenities – community centre, park, workshop, gym etc
- Opportunity for upgrade of existing
- Opportunity for improved use of space

Cons/Potential Objections of a Community Title approach

- Loss of individual control of property
- Less car-parking
- Less apparent private ownership
Benefits to the home owner

- At NO additional cost upfront, the home owner gets an upgrade which will improve their quality of living, positively affecting their physical health and comfort throughout the year.
- Due to the upgrades of the area, including semi-public and public space, roads, and landscaping, value of properties is likely to rise.
- Home owners will have access to other amenities such as community owned buildings, workshop spaces, storage etc.
- With the increasing population, density is rising and 4-5 story developments in typical streets are only a matter of time. This way the community are taking control of when and how density increases, and to their benefit.
- Sense of community will rise, along with a sense of safety and ultimately sense of wellbeing.
**Benefits to Investors/developers**

- No initial cost to buy the land - Usually when an investor wants to buy a section of land, the cost of the land is dependent on its potential. If there is a scheme for a 4-5 story mixed use development, the land will be sold at a higher price. Developers also have to purchase the land and jump through many hoops, including council restrictions and opposition from neighbours who can make the entire venture difficult and costly.
- By buying out the land owners at the ‘value’ of their land, and then paying them for that land through construction and upgrades, investors gain large benefits.
- Due to the nature of this being a complex but one mutually beneficial process, the investor could rest assured that the councils contribution would be through providing services without large fees.

**Benefits to Council**

- Where upgrading roads and other infrastructure was Council’s responsibility, this would now fall to the community.
- All of Councils goals to try and improve wellbeing, improve safety in the neighbourhoods, quality of life, building standards, decrease social isolation and increase density – can be met.
- Council’s contribution is to simply help everyone to get it done.
Neighborhood amenities and wellbeing

Through the application of a community title scheme, wellbeing is addressed in several different ways. When barriers are removed, spaces are shared and emphasis is placed on collective ownership over individual ownership; the collective consciousness is strengthened, and through the nature of a community title and the essential collaboration and communication between residents that would need to take place, political participation is introduced. These combine to work towards restoring the balance between gesellschaft and gemeinschaft type societies, and the balance between individualism and collectivism.

The other way in which wellbeing has the potential to be addressed is through an increase in awareness of how we are connected in modern societies. This is in line with Durkheims concept of organic solidarity, and how by accepting our differences and increasing awareness of our dependence on each other, our connections can be strengthened.\textsuperscript{107}

This can be applied to my site through the incorporation of shared neighbourhood amenities. When buildings are owned by the community, it provides the opportunity for a neighbourhood income to be generated. This would not only ensure continuing maintenance, but would also generate a genuine interest in the success of local business as it would directly affect the residents. Awareness of our dependence can be further encouraged through the incorporation of several community owned buildings which cater for residents who require ‘at home care’. On my site, these buildings have been incorporated along the main street, near a community garden. This inclusion of community owned buildings means that people who are unwell, injured, or need specific care can remain in the neighbourhood. It also generates a greater awareness and sense of responsibility amongst those living there.

\textsuperscript{107} “From Mechanical to Organic Solidarity: Emile Durkheim.”
Figure 68 - Contrasting approaches
The BRANZ House Condition rating scale states that a building's condition can be assessed to fit into 5 different categories: Serious, Poor, Moderate, Good, and Excellent. Based on plans provided by Auckland City Council, publicly available property information on QV, and a site visit I was able to informally assess the physical aspects of each building in order to categorize them appropriately.

Buildings comprising the ‘serious’ or ‘poor’ categories have been identified as being more practical to be demolished, while ‘moderate’ buildings are considered to be salvageable, possibly relocated if necessary, or depending on the greater plan, acceptable to be demolished. Buildings categorized as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ should be conserved wherever possible.

When deciding which buildings needed to be removed it was also important to consider their age, ensuring that a wide range of building ages remained in order to maintain the character of the area.

Table 1: HCS condition rating scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SERIOUS</td>
<td>Health &amp; safety implications, needs immediate attention.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR</td>
<td>Needs attention shortly - within the next three months</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERATE</td>
<td>Will need attention within the next two years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD</td>
<td>Very few defects - near new condition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXCELLENT</td>
<td>No defects - as new condition</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 69 - Housing condition rating scale
PHYSICAL CONDITION ANALYSIS

Figure 70 - Site data

CRITICAL
- Dwellings: 20%
- Buildings: 13%

POOR
- Dwellings: 20%
- Buildings: 13%

MODERATE
- Dwellings: 20%
- Buildings: 13%

GOOD
- Dwellings: 20%
- Buildings: 13%
BUILDING AGE ANALYSIS

Figure 71 - Site Data
READY FOR DESIGN...

Figure 72 - Site
5.50 DESIGN APPROACH TO SPACES

Redistribution of space
One of the consequences of planning suburbia to be divided into individual lots, typically with only one or two dwellings per lot, is that there is a large proportion of inefficient space. This spatial design approach looks at how space can be redistributed to be more efficient, while also using the opportunity to introduce new types of spaces that reduce the divide between the existing public and private realms.

Drawing from the precedents, specifically the way Charles Correa arranged space and the different levels of privacy he created, I have proposed a space redistribution approach called the ‘4 levels of privacy’ with the aim of creating various spatial use opportunities for each individual.

This design approach has a focus of nudging people into more social behavior without removing suburbia’s much loved privacy.

The 1st level of Privacy – Private space
The aim here is to improve the quality of private space. This is done by minimizing unusable space, and re-orientating out-door living where required. To ensure that a range of housing typologies will be present throughout the site, all of the existing dwellings are to have their own private space, the size of which will be dictated by the number of bedrooms – each bedroom accounts for a minimum of 40m² of private space.

Figure 73 - 1
The 3rd level of Privacy – Semi-public space
The Semi Public space is about improving access to open green spaces for everybody. By increasing the amount of green spaces and decreasing their size, it provides each a unique identity that promotes activity and achieves a sense of place. These types of spaces are about creating shared ‘neutral ground’ where residents can collectively feel a sense of belonging due to proximity and function.

Vehicle access
The semi-private spaces for vehicles consist of pocket carparks, small lanes, and shared zones, to help ‘create a new normal’ for residents. The plan is to provide at minimum 2 carparks for every existing dwelling, and one for every new dwelling, along with various public parks.

Pedestrian access
This semi-private space is key to nudging social interaction and pocket communities. It consists of a small courtyard accessible by surrounding dwellings, which helps to connect people by offering a pleasant alternative outdoor space. This space also links directly to a larger and more public space, similar to the way Charles Correa links his shared spaces in the Belapur Housing scheme.
The 4th level of Privacy – Public space

Lastly, this type of public space is the most ‘public’ and consists of the roads, shops on the main street and the larger neighborhood park. The main concept being applied to these areas can be understood as the ‘woonerf’ principle, which is essentially sharing space. The shared street can be understood as a space that first and foremost functions for people. It can be used as a playground, a meeting area, or a walking or cycling path, while its secondary functions are vehicular traffic and parking. This can be taken further by the removal of traffic controls, forcing people to be more aware and considerate. It has been argued by Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs and J.B. Jackson that the street is a physical and social part of the living environment and should be used simultaneously for vehicular movement, social interactions and activities.

A shared road is a residential, public place with the following characteristics:

- Pedestrians have priority over cars
- Walking and playing are allowed everywhere
- There are no conventional roads with raised curbs for pedestrians and cycling lanes
- There is extensive landscaping and street furnishings

The ‘woonerf’ approach originated in Holland has been applied frequently throughout Europe. A good example is the town of Drachten in the Netherlands, where all road signs and traffic have been removed, and the segregation between sidewalks, cycle lands, and roads has been eliminated. The result was that even at a busy intersection there was less congestion, quicker buses, half as many accidents, and more hand signals and communication between people. Through this simple concept that encouraged awareness, people are nudged into driving less robotically and into communicating with others. This ultimately leads to a gemeinschaft type ambience and increased levels of wellbeing.

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"The function of a residential area street as a facilitator of social interaction has often been diminished by the priority accorded to traffic performance."

Figure 77 - Woonerf Street
existing

analyze the spaces
SUBURBAN SPACE RE-DISTRIBUTION CONCEPT

re-mould & remove  →  bring back together  →  INSERT NEW SPACES & BUILDINGS

Figure 78 - Suburban space re-distribution concept
5.51 SPACE DISTRIBUTION DESIGN PROCESS

The design methodology consists of a step by step process that applied varying design strategies to my site in order to work towards achieving the '4 levels of privacy'. Due to the nature of working with the existing infrastructure, as each design strategy was applied unforeseen complexities or unique opportunities would often arise, and subsequently needed to be acknowledged and resolved.

The following steps show the process of design, highlighting each strategy being applied and its repercussions.

Figure 79 - The 4 levels of privacy
Step 1)

Aim: Improve connectivity to local amenity

Action:
New roads

Implication:
- Buildings to be removed/relocated
- Some dwellings are now located close to the road (privacy issues)

Benefit:
Increases existing value by improving access making it used by more people
Step 2)

Aim: Increase activity and amenity

**Action:**
Recommend locations for proposed communal buildings, shops etc.

**Implication:**
Increased proximity from private to public buildings (privacy issues)

**Benefit:**
- Increases pedestrian traffic from one space to another
- Increases sense of place
- Brings people together through ‘neutral ground’
Step 3)

Aim: Make green public space easily accessible by all residents

**Action**
Proposed locations of semi-public green spaces

**Implication**
Dwellings are now located closer to a public space

**Benefit**
Nudges social behavior
Step 4)

Aim: Increase in density

**Action**
Propose location areas for denser development

**Implication**
People will be living in closer proximity to each other in some instances

**Benefit:**
Encourages a diverse neighbourhood
Increases social vibrancy
Step 5)

Aim: Every resident to have access to a semi-private courtyard

Action
Creation of semi-private courtyards

Implication:
- House design complexity is increased due to a new access point from living areas
- Privacy issues between residents sharing a courtyard

Benefit
- Nudges social behavior by offering alternative external spaces shared by others
Step 6)

Aim: Provide private outdoor spaces for all existing residents

**Action**
30m² min of private space per bedroom for every existing dwelling

**Implication**
Spaces are pushed up against one another creating new types of connections to be resolved

**Benefit:**
Improved orientation of private space
More usable private space (increased efficiency)
Step 7)

Aim: Increase connectivity across the street & decrease car dominance

Action
- Limit parking along the road, and instead prioritize ‘pocket car parking’.
- Ensure every existing dwellings has at least 2 car parks, and every new has at least 1.
- Allowance made for Public parking

Implication
Less parking than previously

Benefit
- Increased connectivity across the street
- Improved ‘street’ environment
5.52 DESIGN APPLICATION TO SITE

The 4 levels of privacy
The following is a breakdown of how the 4 levels of privacy have been applied to my site, and a direct comparison to the existing situation outlining the advantages and disadvantages.
Figure 87 - Proposed Master Plan
The 1st level of privacy
(Private space)

EXISTING

Figure 88 - 1
The 1st level of privacy
(Private space)

PROPOSED

Figure 89 - 2
The 2nd level of privacy
(Semi-private vehicle access)

EXISTING

Figure 90 - 2
The 2nd level of privacy
(Semi-private vehicle access)

PROPOSED
The 2nd level of privacy
(Semi-private pedestrian access)

PROPOSED
Semi-Private Courtyard

Figure 93 - Sketch perspective
Figure 95 - Semi private Identities
The 4th level of privacy
/Public space/

EXISTING

Figure 96 - 4
The 4th level of privacy
(Public space)

PROPOSED

Figure 97 - 4
5.53 COMMUNITY AMENITIES

MAIN SHOPS

- Variety of local shops
- Opportunity for community owned buildings here which would generate neighbourhood income
- Residential on upper floors

Figure 98 - Shops
COMMUNAL STORAGE

- In replacement of many detached garages, a larger communal area could be used which would consist of single and double garage options and a range of different sized sheds inside.
- Outdoor courtyard space to activate semi-public park
COMMUNITY OWNED UNITS

- Small 'community owned' units
- An opportunity for 'at home care'
- The ability for residents who are unwell or injured to remain in the neighbourhood.

Figure 100 - At home care
Figure 101 - Caring for others
LAND USE COMPARISON

EXISTING

PROPOSED
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXISTING DENSITY</th>
<th>PROPOSED DENSITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL # OF DWELLINGS</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWELLINGS PER HECTARE</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL # OF DWELLINGS</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWELLINGS PER HECTARE</td>
<td>30dph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># OF NEW DWELLINGS</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># OF NEW HOUSEHOLDS</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.54  A CLOSER LOOK...
APPLIED DESIGN
See following page for a comparative analysis on dwellings labelled 1, 2 & 3.
**EXISTING**

### Example 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of bedrooms</th>
<th>Site area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>449m²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Dwelling m²: 159m²
- Garage/sheds m²: 3m²
- Useable private space: 97m²
- Driveways/parking: 151m²
- Service/low usage space: 39m²

### Example 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of bedrooms</th>
<th>Site area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>423m²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Dwelling m²: 156m²
- Garage/sheds m²: 3m²
- Useable private space: 119m²
- Driveways/parking: 129m²
- Service/low usage space: 16m²

### Example 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of bedrooms</th>
<th>Site area</th>
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<tbody>
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- Dwelling m²: 130m²
- Garage/sheds m²: 35m²
- Useable private space: 513m²
- Driveways/parking: 370m²
- Service/low usage space: 69m²

---

Figure 105 - Comparative analysis
Example 1

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<th># of bedrooms</th>
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Dwelling m²: 174m²  
Private space: 96m²  
Vehicle access: 94m²  
Semi-private Courtyards: 400m²

(Not included) 'Semi-public' park west of dwelling - 1000m²

Example 2

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<th># of bedrooms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Dwelling m²: 180m²  
Private space: 113m²  
Vehicle access: 116m²  
Semi-private Courtyards: 150m²

(Not included) 'Semi-public' park east of dwelling - 450m²

Example 3

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<tr>
<th># of bedrooms</th>
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<td>3</td>
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Dwelling m²: 148m²  
Private space: 101m²  
Vehicle access: 51m²  
Semi-private Courtyards: 171m²

(Not included) 'Semi-public' park north of dwelling - 450m²

Figure 106 - Comparative analysis
EXISTING - NTS

Figure 107 - Existing
APPLIED DESIGN
See following page for a comparative analysis on dwellings labelled 4 & 5.
Example 4

# of bedrooms: 2
Site area: 1012m²

- Dwellings: 221m²
- Garage/sheds: 23m²
- Private space: 465m²
- Vehicle access: 211m²
- Service/low usage space: 92m²

Example 5

# of bedrooms: 3
Site area: 1012m²

- Dwellings: 297m²
- Garage/sheds: 23m²
- Private space: 302m²
- Vehicle access: 260m²
- Service/low usage space: 93m²
Example 4

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</table>

- Dwelling m²: 220 m²
- Private space: 273 m²
- Vehicle access: 311 m²
- Semi-private Courtyards: 233 m²

(Not included) 'Semi-public' park south of dwellings - 880 m²

Example 5

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</tbody>
</table>

- Dwelling m²: 148 m²
- Private space: 101 m²
- Vehicle access: 51 m²
- Semi-private Courtyards: 171 m²

(Not included) 'Semi-public' park north of dwelling - 450 m²

Figure 110 - Comparative analysis
APPLIED DESIGN

See following page for a comparative analysis on dwellings labelled 4 & 5.
### Example 6

| # of bedrooms | Site area
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<td>Dwelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garage/sheds</td>
<td>48m²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private space</td>
<td>156m²</td>
</tr>
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<td>Vehicle access</td>
<td>131m²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service/low usage space</td>
<td>106m²</td>
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### Example 7

| # of bedrooms | Site area
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<td>Dwelling</td>
<td>131m²</td>
</tr>
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<td>Garage/sheds</td>
<td>33m²</td>
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<td>Private space</td>
<td>919m²</td>
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<td>Vehicle access</td>
<td>115m²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service/low usage space</td>
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**Figure 113 - Comparative analysis**
### Example 6

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<td>Dwelling m²</td>
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<td>Vehicle access</td>
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<td>184m²</td>
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*Not included:* Semi-public park north of dwelling - 350m²

![Pie chart for Example 6](chart_example6.png)

### Example 7

<table>
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<td>Dwelling m²</td>
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<td>Private space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-private Courtyards</td>
<td>92m²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not included:* Semi-public park north of dwellings - 350m²

![Pie chart for Example 7](chart_example7.png)
5.6 DESIGN APPROACH TO HOUSING

The second part of my design approach focuses on housing in more detail, and can be broken into three key areas: the complexities, the form and the aesthetic. These different sections will be discussed at a conceptual level of design at this stage, and resolved in more detail for the final examination.

Figure 115 - Approaches to housing
5.61 THE COMPLEXITIES

These complexities can be understood as new elements that have been introduced as a result of the proposed design. In order to increase spatial efficiency, space was redistributed and ‘stacked’ to minimize unusable space and maximize potential space for opportunity. The new ‘complexities’ that have been introduced are as follows:

1. Dwelling to dwelling
2. Dwelling to neighbouring private space
3. Dwelling to semi-private courtyard
4. Dwellings to public spaces

Figure 116 - The 4 different ‘complexities’
1) DWELLING TO DWELLING

To avoid the complexity of structurally joining buildings, which would create many limitations and additional difficulties, dwellings are instead pushed up against each other with a gap of 800mm minimum between the two that essentially functions as a space for the adjoining dwellings to house any services such as heat pumps, power meters, water/gas cylinders, etc. This ‘service gap’ would be accessible from the interior of either dwelling, or from outside, and acts as a way to limit unusable space while also providing a necessary function. This solution also offers additional benefits when compared with other methods such as party walls. As the buildings are not structurally connected, there is opportunity for greater construction and design flexibility, such as the ability to add high windows to a wall between adjacent dwellings.

Figure 117 - Plan and Section
2) **DWELLING TO NEIGHBOURING PRIVATE SPACE**

Similar to the previous method, this connection can be resolved with a service space adjoined to either a concrete block or timber fence. This is to ensure that people still feel like they have a certain degree of control over their property – if the back wall to someone’s house also functions as a boundary to another resident’s private space, then the sense of ‘privacy’ and ‘ownership’ is compromised more than the typical suburban mind-set would be willing to accept.

*Figure 118 - Plan and Section*
3) **DWELLING TO SEMI-PRIVATE COURTYARD**

This transition is perhaps the most important in encouraging community growth and positively affecting wellbeing. Currently, people are used to several thresholds between the ‘public’ realm and the private comfort of their own home. This concept challenges this by creating a transition between the dwelling and a semi-private shared space. To achieve this comfortably, these thresholds need to be considered.

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall was the man behind the concept of ‘proxemics’, which looks at the way people use space and the relationship between comfort and social interaction.

Hall categorizes interpersonal distances into four zones, which he explains can vary according to culture.¹¹⁴

- Intimate space
- Personal space
- Social space
- Public space

Due to the nature of our low densities in suburbia and our individualistic culture, it is safe to assume that our proxemics distances would be at the upper end of the spectrum. With this in mind, I believe that it is important for thresholds between the dwelling and a social space to avoid ‘personal distance’ which is considered to range from approximately half a meter to 1.2m and is defined as being the space that people regard as ‘psychologically theirs’. If this threshold is broken it is typical for people to feel discomfort, anger or anxiety.\textsuperscript{115}

The next space which is the most applicable for the transition between a dwelling and a shared courtyard is the ‘social distance’. This is considered to be from 1.2m to 3.6m and is described as being a comfortable distance to disengage from conversation if wanting to. It is for interactions among acquaintances and would provide an appropriate level of comfort to allow for social interaction to occur.

These principles have been applied through the incorporation of a raised deck facing the semi-private courtyard, which is directly accessible from each dwellings living area. The distance between neighbouring decks is aimed to be in the ‘social distance’ range, and acts to provide a threshold that encourages the occupants of two different dwellings to interact, without infringing on their personal space.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textbf{Figure 120 - Edward Halls Proxemic distances}
4) DWELLING TO PUBLIC SPACES

The biggest issue surrounding this transition is privacy. In order to work through some of the more complex transitions, the two examples given consider privacy issues at multiple building elevations.

PROPOSED THRESHOLD DESIGN

Figure 121 - Proposed threshold design
EXAMPLE ONE
This example is addressing the connection between ground floor bedrooms close to the street edge. A schematic layout is shown for context to highlight the issue of proximity to the public realm.

This complexity can be addressed through thoughtful floor plan layout, appropriately placed windows and glass selection, the use of screens, and landscaping. When required, a ‘cutout’ could also be applied to break up the elevation nearest to the street and allow light in more discretely.

Figure 122 - Example One
EXAMPLE TWO
This example is addressing the complexity of having an existing building on a corner site. In this case a cutout in the corner has also been made to allow for the combination of increased landscaping and screens.

Figure 123 - Example Two
5.52 THE FORM

To further support the idea behind the ‘4 levels of privacy’, and the successful design and use of these spaces, the building form is therefore dictated by the design and function of these spaces.

Figure 124 - The priority of the Semi private space
The elevation below shows the desired scale and the relationship between buildings. Some other elements influencing the form are:

- Building overlook to main streets and semi-public spaces (balconies or rooftops)
- Building heights sympathetic to solar access of the courtyards spaces
- Overhangs to ‘tuck’ vehicles away to provide a sense of security
- ‘Cutouts’ or building ‘set backs’ to increase a sense of privacy where required
Semi-private courtyard

designed for optimum solar access to increase usability

Figure 126 - Semi-private courtyard
5.53 THE AESTHETIC

Although the aesthetic is heavily influenced by the manner a space is arranged, such as landscaping, or the guidelines regarding the form, there is another factor contributing to the aesthetic that is important to consider in order to achieve wellbeing. This is the ‘architectural language’.

One of the key aims to achieving wellbeing is the ability for people to creatively express themselves. When all buildings in an area mirror each other in style – as is seen in some precedents such as Tuscany Towers – it can result in the occupants of the development having a compromised sense of identity, which can in turn inhibit their sense of wellbeing. However, too big of a difference in style between buildings results in visual chaos, disorganization, and a decrease in the collective sense of pride. There is balancing act which must occur between creating too much of the same and everything being different, to maintain a sense of pride in ones community while also having the freedom of creative expression necessary to foster wellbeing.

The Aesthetic aspect of my project will be explored through the design development, where I will seek to implement an ‘architectural language’ that unifies the area while still allowing for sufficient individuality between buildings.

Figure 127 - Aesthetic balance
Figure 128 - Corban village and Tuscany Towers
6.0 CONCLUSION

This paper began by outlining how wellbeing is not the easiest subject to define, quantify, or even discuss. However, to answer my research question of how to improve wellbeing within suburban neighbourhoods, it was necessary to do exactly that.

The discussion endeavoured to answer several critical questions. What is wellbeing? How do we understand it? What are we doing wrong? How does it relate to the built environment? What does research say about wellbeing in New Zealand? And lastly, what efforts are we making to improve it?

This compact theoretical analysis led to the conclusion that an imbalance has occurred across several scales, and in order to address the issues surrounding wellbeing my proposal must respond to the following three objectives:

- THE RESTORATION OF THE BALANCE BETWEEN GESELLSCHAFT TYPE SOCIETIES AND GEMEINSCHAFT TYPE SOCIETIES
- THE RESTORATION OF THE BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM
- A REDIRECTION OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION - The way by which we express ourselves creatively needs to be adjusted from encouraging individualism, towards creating opportunities for people to express themselves creatively in their home and neighbourhood.
The design approach was broken down into 4 categories; density, system, spaces, and housing. Each approach targeted the three objectives from a different perspective. The density approach focused on removing the negative connotations associated with increasing density by offering an alternative densification method that gives control back to the community. This addressed both the first and second objectives by encouraging community involvement in any proposed changes and prioritising the collective over the individual.
The systems approach looked at the way we own land, the effect this has on the people we live with, and how it impacts our wellbeing. It presents an alternative land ownership model which addresses the first and second objectives by restructuring our current system and providing incentives for individuals to prioritise the collective. The spaces approach introduced new types of spaces previously non-existent in suburbia, and details how these can positively encourage social behaviour. These shared spaces make it more difficult to turn a blind eye to the people around you which as a result introduces a moral responsibility beyond oneself. It also has the effect of uniting people through the commonality of location and community, rather than dividing them by income, age, race and class.

The main focus of the housing approach was to address the third objective of ‘redirecting creative expression’. It did this through a design approach to the **form and aesthetic**. To achieve a balance between ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ it sets out design guidelines which seek to unite an area through an architectural language, while also allowing room for individual creative expression of the built environment.

Lastly, this research project quantified wellbeing through statistical analysis and comparison models. This allowed what began as a ‘fluffy’ topic to develop into a more tangible, comprehensible issue, with statistics to support how wellbeing can be achieved.

To further support this proposal, the developed design will take a critical section of the site, use the approaches outlined in this document to present in detail how existing buildings are transformed, how new buildings are introduced, the new qualities of each type of space, and how the architectural language holds it all together.
“Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can’t help them, at least don’t hurt them”.

- Dalai Lama
7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY


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“Quality of Life Survey.” Auckland, NZ, 2014.


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**Total # of Dwellings:** 75  
**Total # of Buildings:** 55

## BUILDINGS TO BE REMOVED

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**Total # of Dwellings Removed = 43/75**  
**Total # of Buildings Removed = 23/55**
## PHYSICAL CONDITION – QUALITY OF MATERIALS

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**TOTAL # OF DWELLINGS** 55

**TOTAL # OF BUILDINGS** 75

### BUILDINGS TO BE DEMOLISHED

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**TOTAL # OF DWELLINGS DEMOLISHED = 43/75**

**TOTAL # OF BUILDINGS DEMOLISHED = 23/55**
9.0 FINAL DESIGN PRESENTATION
FILLING THE BLANKS
A suburban opportunity for wellbeing
Suburbia and Wellbeing
Planning - Before and After

Existing Site 1500
- Existing
- Ownership
- Land Distribution

Proposed Site 1500
- Proposed
- Ownership
- Land Distribution

EXISTING

PROPOSED
Suburbia and Wellbeing

The Plan - Private vs Public
3rd level of privacy
Modification to Existing Dwelling 2
New infill housing

11. 3 bedroom dwelling
12. 2 bedroom dwelling
13. 1 bedroom dwelling
Declaration

Name of candidate: Ashley West

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: Filling the Blanks

is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of

Principal Supervisor: David Turner
Associate Supervisor/s: Jeanette Budge

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

• This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
• The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: ..................................................

Candidate Signature: .................................................. Date: 30/9/16

Student number: 1449938
Full name of author: Ashley West

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project ('the work'):

Filling the Blanks

Practice Pathway: Architecture
Degree: MArch
Year of presentation: 2016

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Signature of author: Ashley West
Date: 30/9/16